



# Vero Beach

## South Florida Ecological Services Office



*Dwindling numbers of Florida panthers have Service biologists searching for ways to protect the existing animals while cooperating with various partners to promote species growth. (photo: SFWMD)*



*The endangered scrub blazing star may be found in remote areas of Polk and Highlands Counties. It has been on the endangered list since 1989, primarily due to loss of habitat. (photo: USFWS)*

### Office Facts

- Established: in Vero Beach, 1955.
- 2003 budget: approximately \$9-million.
- 2003 number of staff: 110.
- Coverage area: 26,000 square miles.
- Includes 19 counties and more than 2,600 miles of coastline.

### Office Goals

- To be the recognized leader in natural resource conservation in South Florida by carrying out Service programs.
- Protect, recover and enhance natural ecological communities.
- Provide strong leadership through the application of sound science.

### Services Provided for

- Private citizens.
- State resource agencies.
- Local governments.
- Federal agencies.

### Activity Highlights

- Review approximately 3,500 federal permits and technical assistance requests each year that affect 50,000-plus acres of wetlands. More than two-thirds of these actions involve endangered species and require consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA).
- Provide guidance for the design and operation of approximately 30 wetland mitigation banks in South Florida.
- From 1995 to 2003, the Service has awarded program funds ranging from \$1,000 to \$100,000 to 73 restoration projects with our contributions averaging 25% of a project's total costs. To date, we have provided more than \$2-million in program funds and technical assistance with \$8,616,500 in total project costs.
- Work with federal, state, tribal and local partners to restore the Everglades. Restoration of the Everglades involves an unprecedented combined effort to ensure the long-term survival of the ecosystems of South Florida.

- Completed the South Florida Multi-species Recovery Plan. The plan and its implementation is the framework for recovery of 68 federally listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.
- Provide technical assistance regarding the importance of addressing contaminants in recovery and restoration efforts.
- Evaluate acquisition parcels for lands needed to restore the Everglades ecosystem as authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill and annual federal appropriations has allocated up to \$3-billion for land acquisition in South Florida. Each acquisition proposal is reviewed for compliance with the ESA, National Environmental Protection Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and other federal laws.

### Our Mission

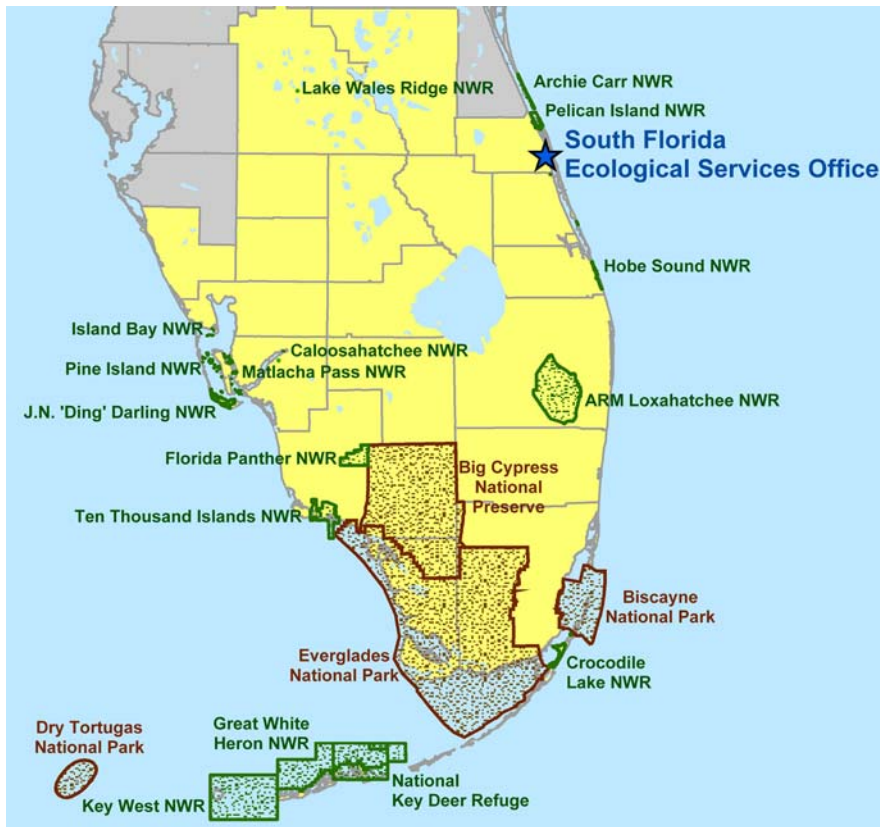
The mission of the South Florida Ecological Services Office is to conserve, protect and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats through consultation, cooperation and communication for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are the principal federal agency responsible for the conservation of natural communities in South Florida.

The Vero Beach office is one of 16 ecological services offices located in 10 states throughout the Southeast United States and the Caribbean.

Our ecological services team is divided into five sections; Endangered Species, Trust Resources, Project Planning, Contaminants and Information Technical Support.

### Endangered Species

While all sections in Ecological Services are involved in supporting the administration of the ESA, this section is charged with guiding the recovering of listed species. They work to conserve those species that may require future listing but have not yet been proposed and they also list new species, prepare and implement recovery plans and work closely with various federal and state agencies and other partners.



*The 19-counties that comprise the area of responsibility for the Vero Beach office is equal to a combination of the states of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In addition to the field office in Vero Beach there are sub-offices in Naples and Big Pine Key; liaison biologists are located in West Palm Beach, Fort Myers and Jacksonville. The area includes more than 2,600 miles of coastline and 16 units of the National Wildlife Refuge system.*

### *Contaminants*

Working with state, federal and local partners to prevent contamination and maintain the health of ecosystems is part of what this section does. They also identify contamination that adversely affects the health of fish, wildlife and their ecosystems and act as federal trustee for fish and wildlife injured by contamination while negotiating settlements from polluters to restore lost resources and their benefits to local citizens.

### *Information Technical Support*

Our Geographic Information Systems (GIS) support is a unit of the IT section and provides an invaluable tool in the continuing effort to conserve and protect wildlife and natural habitats in our area.

### **For more information contact**

Assistant Field Supervisor  
Ecological Services  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
South Florida ES Office  
1339 20th Street  
Vero Beach, FL 32960

### *Trust Resources*

This section works to conserve threatened and endangered species and migratory birds. Through Habitat Conservation Planning, assistance is provided to non-federal interests who wish to develop property and need Incidental Take Permits. Technical assistance on conservation banks, mitigation banks, prescribed burning, dredging and beach renourishment projects are some of the many services provided by this section. In addition, Trust Resources offers financial assistance for habitat restoration, habitat protection, and assessments along South Florida's coasts under the Coastal Grant Program.

### *Project Planning*

Whenever a developer or citizen undertakes a project that may affect an endangered species, wetlands or migratory bird routes, the Project Planning Section is asked to provide recommendations to reduce these impacts to fish and wildlife resources. Biologists in this section provide technical support to the agencies in the planning process, providing fish and wildlife resources information and analyses while recommending measures to mitigate impacts. In addition, they are involved in the consultation process that assists people wishing to insure they do not harm a species or its habitat.